The Man Who Loved His Hands and Two Other Stories

Spiro Markou

The Man Who Loved His Hands and Two Other Stories
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The Pressing Matter

In his bedroom lying in his bed, dressed in his pajamas, Martin looks at his alarm-clock on the night-stand: one minute to seven. He is waiting for it to begin ringing seven o'clock, the time he always wakes and begins getting ready for work. He always tries to be on time for work, and has, in fact, never once failed, at precisely eight o'clock; it is specified in one of the major articles of the director's regulations that he be in his cubicle in the basement of the corporation's building, ready to fulfill all of his many duties to the director, at eight o'clock on the dot, neither a second before nor a second after. Besides that, he does not want his twin to have to wait in his car out in the street for him to get ready for work.

But is it, in fact, his twin's turn to drive Martin to the corporation? If he himself drove his twin to the corporation yesterday, it is his twin's turn to drive him to it today, or if his twin drove him to the corporation yesterday, it is his own turn to drive his twin to it today. Either way, once he thinks about it, he must get to the corporation on time particularly today; there is the pressing matter he must attend to and the director wants him to figure out the solution to. But what is it? No, though he remembers that there is the pressing matter, Martin cannot remember what it is.

He looks at his alarm-clock on the night-stand: one minute to seven. Still? He looks at it closely: the second-hand motionless. His alarm-clock must be stuck. He takes it from the night-stand and puts it to his ear: complete silence–a siren begins blaring. He puts his stuck alarm-clock on the night-stand. It sounds like a fire-

engine siren and seems to be coming not from his stuck alarm-clock, but from out in the street in front of his house. Or is it that his twin, always funning with different kinds of car-horns, has arrived in his car to drive him to the corporation? But how can it be him so early, at least according to Martin's stuck alarm-clock? No, there must a fire-engine somewhere in the neighborhood and therefore a fire.

It is, in fact, well that the fire-engine siren is blaring; otherwise, with his alarm-clock stuck at one minute to seven, he might fall to sleep and oversleep and therefore get to the corporation late, or maybe even sleep through the whole day and therefore never get to the corporation. And he must get there and attend to the pressing matter. But what is it? No, though he remembers that there is the pressing matter, Martin cannot remember what it is.

But he does remember that the pressing matter was given to him to attend to by the director, possibly yesterday, or at a more distant time in the past, maybe even, once he thinks about it, on the same day his position in the corporation was given to him by the director. There must be a paper; his position in the corporation and one of his major duties to the director is to deal with papers. Yes, a paper regarding the pressing matter was surely given to him by the director. But where did Martin put it after that? He better try to remember where it is, to see what the pressing matter is; the director might very well take him to task on it one moment today at the corporation–with him remembering neither what the pressing matter is nor where the paper regarding it is, much less possessing the solution to it.

Martin hears a long violent shrill whistle surely right outside the front-door of his house. It must be his twin playing a joke on him. A splintering crack against the front-door, then unintelligible

shouts and thudding footfalls and short violent shrill whistles all over his house–so much racket! With all the racket, particularly the blaring of the fire-engine siren out in the street, he cannot concentrate on trying to remember what the pressing matter is. Or, first, where is the paper regarding it? No, he can remember neither the one nor the other, particularly with all the racket–the door of his bedroom bursts open and a torrent of water from a fire-hose, held by firemen in a line down the hallway, aims straight at him lying in his bed and drenches him wearing his pajamas, then aims straight at his shirt and pants laid-out on the dresser, ready for him to put on for work, and drenches them.

The firemen drenched the only shirt and pants Martin has to wear to the corporation today without cause; there is no fire in his bedroom nor, as far as he knows, anywhere else in his house. He should have passed by the dry-cleaner after work yesterday and picked up his only other shirt and pants he has to wear to the corporation, but forgot to; he was even yesterday, once he thinks about it, preoccupied with the pressing matter.

No shirt and pants to wear and with the pressing matter waiting for him, and only him, at the corporation. No, he cannot shirk it by giving it to his twin to attend to; he is surely under a great obligation to the director, at the very least for his position in the corporation, not only to remember it, but to figure out the solution to it. Besides that, if he shirks the pressing matter, the director will know immediately, though most likely be, as usual, in his suite on the top-floor of the building, and take him to task, or maybe even discharge him from his position in the corporation, which Martin, in fact, never even thought that he might one day lose.

In his bedroom lying in his bed, dressed in his soaking-wet pajamas, Martin makes an extra effort to remember what the

pressing matter is and cannot remember, then where at the corporation he misplaced the paper regarding it and cannot remember. Anyway, yes, he himself must have misplaced the paper regarding the pressing matter; the director surely did not misplace it–misplace it somewhere in the building to test his competency and therefore whether or not he deserves to hold his position in the corporation? And what if the director misplaced, in fact, hid the paper regarding the pressing matter somewhere in his suite on the top-floor?

Two firemen holding a stretcher, one in front and the other in back, approach Martin lying in his bed–the fireman in front is his twin! What is he doing here with the firemen? But, of course, Martin forgot that his twin is a volunteer fireman, as he himself used to be before he quit because of the bother. Nevertheless, volunteer fireman or not, was he not supposed to drive him to the corporation today? His twin averts his face and lifts the stretcher slightly toward him lying in his bed. Thinking it only right that he try not to cause his twin any problems with the other firemen, by impeding the execution of his function of volunteer fireman, Martin rises from his bed and lies on the stretcher held by the two firemen. They turn him lying on it toward his alarm-clock on the night-stand: one minute to seven and the second-hand motionless. He is lucky his alarm-clock is still stuck; he still has one minute before he must begin getting ready for work.

But even if his stuck alarm-clock in one minute strikes seven o'clock and he, if they allow him to, gets up from the stretcher held by the two firemen and begins getting ready for work, what is he going to wear? His shirt and pants on the dresser are soaking-wet, leaving aside whether or not the firemen will allow him to change into them, and his only others are at the dry-cleaner. He

cannot possibly appear at the corporation in his pajamas, particularly being soaking-wet, and himself, once he thinks about it, barefoot; if he in his soaking-wet pajamas and barefoot enters the building and his cubicle in the basement, the director will surely see him, as he always sees or at least knows of his derelictions of his many duties to him, even if, as usual, in his suite on the top-floor, and take him to task for appearing there in such a state, or maybe even discharge him from his position in the corporation, which Martin, in fact, never even thought that he might one day lose.

But he must get to the corporation today, even if he must risk appearing there in his soaking-wet pajamas and barefoot, and try to find out what the pressing matter is and, if successful, figure out the solution, the incontrovertible and final solution to it–to have done with it once and for all!

The two firemen holding him lying on the stretcher go quickly out of his bedroom, down the hallway and out past the front-door, which he notices is splintered apart, then abruptly stop there. Martin, thinking that he should try now before the firemen take him away to somewhere, makes an extra effort to remember what the pressing matter is and cannot remember, then where at the corporation he misplaced the paper regarding it and cannot remember–therefore the director did hide it somewhere in the building, maybe even somewhere in his suite on the top-floor? If so, even if he gets there, what will Martin do?

The two firemen holding him lying on the stretcher dash off down the driveway of his house, then abruptly stop at the street, beside his mailbox and the postman in front of it, with an envelope in his hand. The postman waves the envelope at him

lying on the stretcher, lifts the lid of his mailbox and tosses it in, then turns and walks away down the street.

The postman neither greeted Martin nor said anything else to him, as he usually does when they meet, probably because he was disconcerted by seeing him lying on the stretcher held by the two firemen and wearing his soaking-wet pajamas and barefoot, not to mention the front-door of his house splintered apart–with no fire in his house!–or, what he himself now notices, the fire-engine with the rest of the fire-company parked in the street. Besides that, he was himself impolite; he neither greeted the postman nor said anything else to him, as he usually does when they meet. But it is just that he is very preoccupied and anxious with the pressing matter, whatever it is, and the paper regarding it, wherever it is, and with him delayed here by the firemen and no shirt and pants and no shoes.

But once he gets to the corporation, shirt and pants and shoes or not, wearing his soaking-wet pajamas and barefoot or not, and finds the paper regarding the pressing matter, learns what it is and figures out the solution to it, which, once he thinks about it, he likely must do without fail today, the director having hinted to him that he should, possibly yesterday, or at a more distant time in the past, maybe even, once he thinks about it, on the same day his position in the corporation was given to him by the director, Martin will feel very much better and therefore tomorrow morning, if they meet, be able to greet the postman and, in fact, will greet him as politely and ingratiatingly as possible–because what if the postman stops delivering to him papers from the corporation? What will the director, undoubtedly thinking that he is ignoring them, say to Martin after he, how he usually learns of the director’s orders, hears a rumor in the corporation that he is

wanted by him at the door of his suite on the top-floor of the building and climbs up all those stairs to the top-floor and sees him waiting for him, and only him, at the door of his suite? And what if the director will tell him to enter his suite, which he did not do even on the day he hired him? Will it not mean that he is going to discharge him from his position in the corporation, which Martin, in fact, never even thought that he might one day lose?

The two firemen holding him lying on it bring the stretcher slowly higher and higher toward his mailbox, then abruptly stop, with him an inch from it. His twin holding the front of the stretcher looks over his shoulder and sticks out his tongue at him, then looks away toward his mailbox and nods at it emphatically several times. Martin, trying not to raise himself from his lying position on the stretcher, thinking, for all he knows, that he might be in some way punished for cheating by the two firemen, tries to reach his hand to his mailbox an inch away, then suddenly gives up, feeling that it is futile. But part of it is that he just cannot concentrate for the fact that he is very preoccupied and anxious with the pressing matter. Besides that, there is the fact that he is not at the corporation trying to deal with it, but stuck here lying on the stretcher held by the two firemen and dressed in his soaking-wet pajamas and barefoot–with no fire in his house nor anywhere else in the neighborhood he can see at that!

What time can it be? It must be past seven o'clock, the time he should be getting ready for work. And what if it is already eight o'clock, precisely eight o'clock, with the director in his suite on the top-floor of the corporation's building waiting for Martin to hear a rumor in the corporation–with him not even there!–he is wanted by him at the door of his suite, climb up all those stairs to the top-floor and approach him at the door of his suite, to demand

from him on the spot the incontrovertible and final solution to the pressing matter? And even if he somehow figures out it without even knowing what the pressing matter is, he in his soaking-wet pajamas and barefoot will not be able to present it to the director. But maybe, with it being a nice summer day, his pajamas will soon dry? Therefore maybe, if he somehow gets away from the firemen and finds transportation to the corporation, he in his dry pajamas albeit barefoot can present to the director the incontrovertible and final solution to the pressing matter?

The two firemen holding him lying on it bring the stretcher slowly lower and lower toward the driveway, then suddenly dump him on it, without hurting him. Lying in a tumble on the driveway, Martin looks up: his twin looking down at him laughing convulsively without a sound. Thinking that he will surely help him, being his twin, and might want to make up for the bad joke of dumping him on the driveway he undoubtedly instigated, though likely against fire-company procedure and therefore might get him into trouble with the other firemen, Martin reaches his hand out toward his twin. His twin reaches his hand in the fireman's glove slowly closer and closer to his outstretched hand, then abruptly stops, with his hand in the fireman's glove an inch from it. Martin, thinking that he should try not to appear ungrateful for his twin's at least willingness to help, stands up in front of his mailbox.

Suddenly remembering the envelope delivered by the postman, probably being dumped from the stretcher on the driveway made him forget it, he lifts the lid of his mailbox and withdraws it, then looks at it: nothing either written or printed nor even any postage on it. Though its name is not on it as usually with any mail from it, the blank envelope might be from the corporation and its

contents even have some connection to the pressing matter. He tears open one end of it, pulls out a birthday-card and opens it: a word extremely faintly written. The birthday-card having been delivered to him by the postman, maybe it is his name? But, whatever the extremely faint word is, it is not his birthday today nor any of these summer days.

Martin, feeling that the blank envelope torn open by him can be of no further use, lifts the lid of his mailbox and tosses it in, then notices a smell of fish. He sniffs the birthday-card: a smell of fish. Feeling that it might be wrong, despite the smell of fish, not to keep it, he looks stealthily at the two firemen with their back to him, who, for all he knows, might not permit him to keep it for some reason of fire-company procedure, and slips the birthday-card into a pocket of his pajamas, which he notices are now dry.

Yes, thanks to the nice summer day, his pajamas are dry and therefore dressed in them albeit barefoot he can go to the corporation and attend to the pressing matter–if only the firemen let him leave. But does not one of them his twin understand that he must get to the corporation? Therefore is he, exploiting his function of volunteer firemen, trying, in fact, to keep him from getting there for some reason of rivalry or envy? To keep him from attending to the pressing matter and therefore lower him in the eyes of the director to the point of even getting him discharged by him? But, no, Martin cannot believe it; his twin, though a joker and even carrying his jokes too far at times, has never shown any signs of rivalry or envy. Besides that, once he thinks about it, his twin should likewise be getting to the corporation, instead of tarrying here as a volunteer fireman.

Martin, suddenly thinking, for all he knows, that the two firemen might carry him to some transportation to go to the corporation

with, particularly with one of them being his twin and knowing that he must get there, lies down on the stretcher on the driveway. The two firemen pick up the stretcher with him lying on it, his twin in front and the other fireman in back, and go into the street to his twin's car, which it seems Martin did not notice, parked behind the fire-engine with the rest of the fire-company. One of the firemen climbs down from the fire-engine and takes his twin's place holding the front of the stretcher. His twin looks at him lying on it and snickers several times, then removes the fireman's uniform, including the helmet, gloves and boots: dressed in one of the sets of his shirt and pants for work and one of the pairs of his shoes–how very lucky to be dressed for work properly, in strict adherence to the pertinent articles of the director's regulations!

His twin in his shirt and pants and shoes for work bends over Martin lying on the stretcher held by the two firemen, closes his eyes and makes a sound like a snore several times, then suddenly thrusts his bare wrist, where he usually wears his watch, in front of Martin's face and points at it emphatically several times. He goes to his car, gets in and starts it, then as he drives away down the street his car-horn begins blaring like a fire-engine siren.

Therefore it might have been his twin who, too early at Martin's house to drive him to the corporation, for a joke woke him with the blaring of his car-horn like a fire-engine siren at what Martin's stuck alarm-clock indicated one minute to seven. But even if he did not want to play a joke on him, his twin had to be early at Martin's house in his function of volunteer fireman, though, it turned out, on a false alarm, there being no fire in his house.

Anyway, as his twin probably meant to remind him when he pointed at his bare wrist where he usually wears his watch, Martin should be getting ready for work, or even getting to work; it might

be, for all he knows, nearing eight o'clock, or even precisely eight o'clock, the time he should be in his cubicle in the basement of the corporation's building, today trying to find the paper regarding the pressing matter, at the very least, if successful, to find out what it is.

But why did his twin drive away without him? If Martin remembers correctly, did he not drive his twin in his own car to the corporation yesterday, therefore is it not his twin's turn to drive him in his car to it today? But, once he thinks about it, is his own car not in his garage? If he gets away from the two firemen holding him lying on the stretcher, and the rest of the fire-company, who he sees are staring wide-eyed at him, probably because he is wearing his pajamas and barefoot in public, should he not drive himself in his own car to the corporation? If he drives faster a bit or slower a bit, he might even get there on time, at eight o'clock on the dot, neither a second before nor a second after, in strict adherence to the time specified in one of the major articles of the director's regulations that he be in his cubicle in the basement of the building, ready to fulfill all of his many duties to the director.

But maybe he should not drive himself in his own car to the corporation today; the director will know he did on a day he was not supposed to, and not to mention in his pajamas and barefoot, and therefore might refuse to accept from him the incontrovertible and final solution to the pressing matter, if he somehow figures out it without even knowing what the pressing matter is.

The two firemen holding him lying on the stretcher go behind the fire-engine with the rest of the fire-company, who he sees are making obscene gestures at him, probably because he is wearing his pajamas and barefoot in public. The fire-engine begins moving

down the street, then after a second abruptly stops. A neighborhood girl, dressed in a bathing-suit, probably because of the nice summer day, with a lollipop in her mouth, skips up to him lying on the stretcher, then removes the lollipop from her mouth and offers him it. Martin lifts his head from the stretcher and opens his mouth. The neighborhood girl in the bathing-suit averts her face and puts the lollipop in his mouth, then suddenly cartwheels away down the street.

The two firemen holding him lying on the stretcher dash off past the fire-engine with the rest of the fire-company, who he hears are hooting and cat-calling him, probably because he is wearing his pajamas and barefoot in public, and run very fast down the street, nearly making him swallow the lollipop in his mouth, to the avenue and a taxi with the trunk open, then suddenly dump him in the trunk and slam it shut. The taxi with him in the pitch-dark trunk screeches away, then after a second abruptly stops. A clock ticks once in the pitch-darkness and the trunk opens: the two firemen who dumped him in it looking at him and a baby-stroller beside them. His glance falls on his own alarm-clock beside him in the trunk: one minute to seven and the second-hand motionless. He is lucky that his alarm-clock is still stuck; he still has one minute before he must begin getting ready for work.

But who put his stuck alarm-clock in the trunk of the taxi? The only person he can think of is his twin. Having somehow got possession of it, after he in his shirt and pants and shoes for work drove away from in front of Martin’s house down the street, being a volunteer fireman, as he himself used to be before he quit because of the bother, and therefore knowing where the two firemen were going to take him, his twin maybe made a stop on the avenue behind the taxi and put Martin’s stuck alarm-clock in

the open trunk; being his twin, he surely wanted to remind him that he should in one minute, at seven o'clock, begin getting ready for work.

Wearing his pajamas and barefoot, with the lollipop in his mouth given to him by the neighborhood girl in the bathing-suit, Martin picks up his stuck alarm-clock and climbs out of the trunk of the taxi to in front of the two firemen and the baby-stroller beside them. He sees the taxi has stopped in front of a fish-restaurant in the midst of the city's main entertainment quarter. What with him here and it there on the other side of the city, how will he ever make it to the building of the corporation and his cubicle in the basement on time, at precisely eight o'clock? And even if he somehow gets away from the two firemen and makes it to the corporation, if only late and only in his pajamas and barefoot, how will he ever have time to find the paper regarding the pressing matter, which the director might very well have hid somewhere in his suite on the top-floor, to make it, in fact, impossible for him to find it, and therefore have time to find out what the pressing matter is? And even if he somehow finds out what it is, how will he ever have time to figure out the incontrovertible and final solution to it before the director demands it from him, which he might very well do the exact moment Martin in his pajamas and barefoot enters his cubicle in the basement?

The two firemen in unison point at Martin, then at the baby-stroller emphatically several times. He, thinking that he is too big to fit in it, hesitates to follow what is likely an order. The two firemen in unison bring a whistle to their lips and blow several short violent shrill whistles. He makes to sit in the baby-stroller and a woman, dressed in a wedding-dress, surely because she is

going to her wedding, approaches and pretends to slap his face several times, probably because he made to sit in the baby-stroller. She removes the lollipop from his mouth, puts it in her own mouth and swallows it whole, without choking on it at all, then snatches his stuck alarm-clock from his hands and puts it in the seat of the baby-stroller. His stuck alarm-clock in the seat ticks once and begins ringing, in all likelihood seven o'clock, having been stuck at one minute to. The woman in the wedding-dress grabs hold of the baby-stroller with his alarm-clock in the seat ringing and runs off with it down the street, probably because she is in a hurry to get to her wedding.

Seven o'clock. But how long was his alarm-clock stuck at one minute to? Though fairly sure it ticked once and began ringing seven, it might have been, for all he knows, eight o'clock on the dot, neither a second before nor a second after, the time specified in one of the major articles of the director's regulations that he be in his cubicle in the basement of the corporation's building, ready to fulfill all of his many duties to the director.

The two firemen marshal Martin from the street to in front of the door of the fish-restaurant, then dart inside. It is too bad that the two firemen probably want him to wait outside; what with all the fuss with the firemen at his house, he missed his breakfast and thinks that a bite of fish would be nice before he tries to get to the building of the corporation on the other side of the city. But, yes, he should have eaten the lollipop given to him by the neighborhood girl in the bathing-suit before the woman in the wedding-dress took it from him and swallowed it whole.

Several men and women, wearing dress-clothes and dress-shoes, dance up to him and, dancing around him, give him ticket-like pieces of paper, then dart inside the fish-restaurant. Several men

and women, wearing dress-clothes and dress-shoes, dance up to him and, dancing around him, give him ticket-like pieces of paper, then dart inside the fish-restaurant. Several men and women, wearing dress-clothes and dress-shoes, dance up to him and, dancing around him, give him ticket-like pieces of paper, then dart inside the fish-restaurant. His hands full of them, he looks at the ticket-like pieces of paper: nothing either written or printed on them. But, regardless of the fact that they are blank, how was he mistaken for the doorman, particularly with him wearing his pajamas and being barefoot?

Anyway, if all those men and women in the dress-clothes and dress-shoes, which, being morning and for the fact that they danced, they must be wearing for some kind of celebration, did not notice, or at least showed no signs that they noticed, he is wearing his pajamas and barefoot in the midst of the city's main entertainment quarter in broad daylight, might the director in his suite on the top-floor of the corporation's building not notice he is in such a state in his cubicle in the basement, if he somehow gets there? But even the firemen at his house, at least the ones on the fire-engine who were staring wide-eyed at him, making obscene gestures at him and hooting and cat-calling him because of it, noticed he is wearing his pajamas and barefoot in public, though in their function of firemen of rushing to houses to put out a fire, or, as in his case, where they mistakenly believe that there is one, in the morning or even late at night, they should be used to seeing people in such a state in public. Besides that, the director in his suite on the top-floor somehow always knows things of Martin in his cubicle in the basement, particularly his derelictions of his many duties to him.

Therefore, yes, it is best to wait here at the door of the fish-restaurant, unless he finds some clothes and shoes. As for clothes, once he thinks about it, why not go to the dry-cleaner and pick up his shirt and pants he forgot after work yesterday and go to the corporation in them albeit barefoot? But, no, he forgot that he does not have money in any of the pockets of his pajamas to pay the dry-cleaner's bill.

His hands full of the blank ticket-like pieces of paper given to him by the dancing men and women in the dress-clothes and dress-shoes, Martin feels a tap on his shoulder and turns round: a man, dressed in a door-man's uniform, standing in front of the door of the fish-restaurant. The man, undoubtedly the doorman, what with the uniform and for the fact that he is standing in front of the door, suddenly begins weeping convulsively without a sound, probably because he just thought of something very distressing, removes the hat of the uniform and extends it bottom-up toward him. Martin, thinking that, to let him pass, the doorman might accept, in lieu of money, the blank ticket-like pieces of paper, brings his hands full of them over the hat and drops all of them in it. The doorman abruptly ceases weeping convulsively without a sound and dons the hat with all of the ticket-like pieces of paper inside, without spilling a single one.

The doorman steps aside. Martin makes to enter the fish-restaurant and the doorman jumps in front of him. The doorman steps aside. Martin makes to enter the fish-restaurant and the doorman jumps in front of him. The doorman steps aside. Martin makes to enter the fish-restaurant and the doorman jumps in front of him. Martin, wondering whether he should simply give up, smells a smell of fish waft from the door behind the doorman and suddenly remembers the birthday-card with the extremely faint

word inside delivered to him in the blank envelope by the postman. He removes it from the pocket of his pajamas he hid it in and, thinking that it might do as an invitation to get in, gives it to the doorman. The doorman puts it to his nose and sniffs, undoubtedly the smell of fish he himself sniffed earlier in front of his mailbox, then puts it in his mouth and, stepping aside, begins eating it. Martin passes by the doorman eating the birthday-card with the extremely faint word inside, probably because he is very hungry, and enters the fish-restaurant.

Standing in the vestibule of the fish-restaurant, his glance falls on a wheelchair: shreds of what appear to be clothes heaped in the seat. He steps up to the wheelchair and looks at them closely: shreds of his shirt and pants he forgot to pick up from the dry-cleaner after work yesterday. His twin, being a volunteer fireman, as he himself used to be before he quit because of the bother, knowing where the two firemen were going to take him in the trunk of the taxi, and being his twin, probably had the dry-cleaner send them here and, if so, probably paid the bill. Feeling that they might be better, though pretty much ruined by the dry-cleaner, or more likely, once he thinks about it, by his twin for a joke, Martin removes his pajamas, then picks up the shreds of his shirt and pants from the seat of the wheelchair and dresses in them.

Except for a pair of shoes, Martin is ready for work, or at least as ready as he can be under the circumstances. He has simply to sit in the wheelchair, push himself in it out of the fish-restaurant and through the city to the other side and the building of the corporation, then get up from it, enter the building and go down to his cubicle in the basement. But when he gets there, if he will not be able to find immediately, as he must, the paper regarding the pressing matter? Much less without it to remember immediately,

as he must, the pressing matter? Therefore much, much less without the paper regarding it to figure out immediately, as he must, the incontrovertible and final solution to the pressing matter? What will he say to the director who in his suite on the top-floor will undoubtedly send down a rumor that he wants it immediately, the exact moment he in the shreds of his shirt and pants and barefoot enters his cubicle in the basement, if he does not simply come down in person and discharge him on the spot for transgressing several articles of his regulations for appearing there in such a state, not to mention arriving there in the wheelchair, which he will surely know of? What then? If discharged by the director and thrown out of the building of the corporation into the street on his orders, what will Martin do without his position in the corporation, which he, in fact, never even thought that he might one day lose?

Martin hears a phone begin ringing and looks at the wheelchair: a phone in the seat ringing, which it seems that he did not notice before, probably because it must have been buried beneath the shreds of his shirt and pants. Thinking that the phone-call might be for him from the corporation, and even his twin having for him information regarding the pressing matter, he picks up the receiver and puts it to his ear: a din of blaring of fire-engine sirens, screaming of men and women and roaring of what seem to be flames–he, feeling that it is a wrong number and therefore not for him, replaces the receiver. But, once he thinks about it, why not call the corporation himself and ask for his twin, to have him try at least to put off the director regarding the pressing matter? He picks up the receiver and puts it to his ear: complete silence. He bangs it on the back of his hand a couple of times and puts it to his

ear: complete silence. Martin replaces the receiver of the phone in the seat of the wheelchair.

But why all the worry since wakened at what his stuck alarm-clock indicated one minute to seven either by the blaring of his twin's car-horn like a fire-engine siren or of the fire-engine siren itself, and all the fuss till now, standing in the vestibule of the fish-restaurant, dressed in the shreds of his shirt and pants and barefoot, to get to the corporation and attend to the pressing matter? Has his twin on his behalf not likely informed the director of the events of the morning, which might help to extenuate somewhat the fact of Martin's absence from the corporation?

But, no, he cannot leave it to his twin; the director will want to hear from him himself any excuses he might have for the fact of his absence from the corporation, and today at that, before he decides the number and severity of transgressions of his regulation's articles it entails. Yes, Martin must call the corporation and, though likely futile, try to get through to the director in his suite on the top-floor of the building and speak to him personally. He picks up the receiver of the phone in the seat of the wheelchair, then slams it down, suddenly thinking that the director, if he somehow reaches him in his suite on the top-floor, will immediately ask him for the incontrovertible and final solution to the pressing matter–with him not even knowing what the pressing matter is!

Dressed in the shreds of his shirt and pants and barefoot, Martin leaves the vestibule of the fish-restaurant, enters the dining-room and stands at the entrance. He sees that the dining-room is packed with a great number of naked men and women, sitting silent and motionless at the tables, with only piles of fish-bones on them. What with all of which, the great number of customers, their not

wearing any clothes and shoes, their abstaining from making any sound and stir and the lack of any food and drink, maybe some celebration, or whatever the special occasion or event was, has ended.

Martin hears a clock begin ticking and looks down beside him: an alarm-clock on the head-waiter's table, among used plates, bowls, glasses, knives, forks and spoons, one exactly like his own taken from him and put in the seat of the baby-stroller by the woman in the wedding-dress: one minute to eight and the second-hand turning. He has only some seconds under one minute to leave the fish-restaurant and, though dressed in the shreds of his shirt and pants and barefoot, walk across the city to the building of the corporation and be in his cubicle in the basement at precisely eight o'clock. Yes, it is too late. And even if not, and even if, leaving aside being barefoot, the shreds of his shirt and pants might somehow pass the director's inspection, he cannot show up at the corporation and face the director without possessing the incontrovertible and final solution to the pressing matter.

Martin looks down beside him: the alarm-clock exactly like his own on the head-waiter's table among the used tableware strikes eight o'clock and begins ringing. He reaches to it and as he shuts off the alarm a phone begins ringing behind him in the vestibule of the fish-restaurant, probably the one in the seat of the wheelchair. The phone-call must be for him from the corporation, what with it being, according to the alarm-clock exactly like his own, some seconds after eight and him not being, as he should be, in his cubicle in the basement of the building. And it must be the director himself, wanting not only to take him to task for not being there, but to hear from him the incontrovertible and final solution to the pressing matter–with him having no idea whatsoever what

the pressing matter is!–and, for the fact that he is at a complete loss regarding it, order him to come to the corporation immediately and climb up all those stairs to the top-floor and enter his suite, which he has never been told by him to enter, not even on the day he was hired by him. Yes, what else will the director then do, but discharge him? And what will Martin do without his position in the corporation, which he, in fact, never even thought that he might one day lose?

Standing at the entrance of the fish-restaurant's dining-room, packed with the great number of naked men and women sitting silent and motionless at the tables with only piles of fish-bones on them, dressed in the shreds of his shirt and pants and barefoot, Martin wonders what the pressing matter is–the phone ceases ringing behind him in the vestibule, probably the one in the seat of the wheelchair.

Alone in a Boat

Before the mirror hunched over, Daniel notices lather covering his face and remembers that he at some time in the past used scissors on the many years' growth of his white beard, then begins shaving with a razor and feels it unwieldy in his trembling hand. He should not be feeling any anxiousness about seeing his father at breakfast this morning; he is a man and has been for many years. But it is simply the thought of what his father was: a firm intense man who not too seldom exploded with the violence of his iron fists. But, though possessed of a firm intense bearing, even into his elderly years, he only acted violently in the days he owned the bar in the red-light district of the city, when he was young and Daniel himself a child.

Before the mirror less hunched over, Daniel continues shaving with the razor and feels it less unwieldy in his more steady hand. The bar's customers were mostly natives of the red-light district, thieves, cheats, snitches, pushers, junkies, pimps, whores and others of similar ilk and even worse. When he was a child, he did not know that they were such and such and only understood later when he grew up. Even so, he was often frightened by them with their sinister appearance and the din and commotion they made, though he always knew that his father could and would deal with any one of them, or even any number of them, having alone repeatedly confronted several at once, on a few occasions, forced by their numbers, with the .38, which he otherwise kept under the counter beside the cash-register. Moreover, the customers scared Daniel purposely by roughing with him, saying obscene things to him, making him take sips of whiskey and puffs of cigars, flicking

their lighters at him, stabbing their knives at him and making him touch and kiss the women. Regardless, there was always his father, the safety of his father: his fearless father with his iron fists. But, though he took immediate action whenever necessary, he never started fights and particularly never messed with the women, who were the cause of so many of the fights in the bar.

Before the mirror erect, Daniel rinses off the residue of lather from his face and sees the many years' growth of his white beard, and feels a throb of the old familiar fear. Did he not just now shave off the last of it? And at some time in the past cut off with scissors most of it? He spreads a large amount of lather over the many years' growth of his white beard, then rinses it off and sees his face completely shaved and, better yet, young, and feels relieved.

He arrived at the house in the country last night, or the night previous to that, or the night previous to that, or the night previous to that long-ago spring morning–long-ago spring morning?–and did not get to see his father, regardless of how hard he tried, even having entreated someone to help him; someone said to him that his father was somewhere sleeping and could not be disturbed or out in the woods searching for him, as when Daniel was a child and hid in them frightened before his imminent departure from the house in the country, the house in the country with the garden he liked so much to play in and frightened, very frightened before his imminent return to the city, the red-light district and the bar, the bar with the sinister customers.

Before the mirror erect, Daniel looks intently and minutely at his face and sees it still completely shaved and, better yet, young, and feels reassured. He makes to turn away from the mirror and feels a throb of the old familiar fear. He should stay here before the

mirror, or, if not, go hide in the woods. But maybe his father is in them searching for him, as someone said to him when he arrived at the house in the country–the night previous to that long-ago spring morning?–to find him and force him to return to the bar with the sinister customers. Therefore it will be better if his father is somewhere sleeping and cannot be disturbed, as someone said to him when he arrived at the house in the country–the night previous to that long-ago spring morning?–so that he can go hide in the woods and not return to the bar with the sinister customers.

Before the threat of the bar with the sinister customers, Daniel looks at the razor in his hand and wonders whether he should take it with him, then suddenly recalls the .38 his father kept under the counter beside the cash-register. Why does he need even the razor, much less the gun? For he is at the house in the country and not planning on leaving anytime soon. Moreover, even if something threatens him here, his father is somewhere near to keep him safe. But keep him safe and him a man? No, Daniel is not a child anymore but a man and has been for many years...

...Extremely hunched over, hairless, shriveled, emaciated to the bone, feeble as can be, trembling uncontrollably, Daniel is an old, old man somewhere alone, alone, alone...

...Alone in a boat on an unseen stream through lightless catacombs with a hollow sound of plashing and dripping.

Daniel enters the day-room and sees his mother, wearing an extremely austere black dress, sitting at the table before the window open on the garden in the spring morning.

She turns and looks at him as if she did not recognize him, as if he were a complete stranger, then forces an obliging expression to her elderly face framed by her white hair.

What is wrong with his mother? ‘Good-morning, Mrs. Butler,’ says Daniel. Why did he call her that? He sits in the chair beside her and notices, in stark contrast to the extremely austere black she is wearing, his own attire, a casual bright-pink suit with a fresh white carnation pinned to the left lapel. Why did he deck out in such a fashion for a visit to his parents?

‘Good-morning, young man,’ replies his mother. ‘What would you like for breakfast?’

Why did his mother not call him by his name? ‘Thank you, but I didn’t come here to the house in the country in the spring to eat,’ he says. Of course not, but why even think to say such a thing?

His mother places a cracked and chipped cup filled with coffee before him. ‘We’re out of milk,’ she says and points at a dusty empty bottle. ‘And, young man, sorry, there’s no sugar–we’ve been drinking bitter coffee for many years.’

Daniel, trying to accept the fact that he is “young man” to her, looks at his mother wearing the extremely austere black dress with an expression, he hopes, of unfeigned commiseration.

‘How’s your spring allergy?’ asks his mother.

His spring allergy? He has not had a problem with it since he was a child and used to come with his parents here to the house in the country in the spring. His mother probably asked from old habit and for the fact that this is the first time, as far as he can recall, he has visited them here since he grew up. But why did he come see his parents here at the house in the country? Why just now? Anyway, whatever the reason, hopefully his mother will not ask him why he did not come sooner; he deeply regrets the fact and, what is more, does not even know why. But he does know that he was often afraid through the many years and wanted to see them, and whenever afraid to a point beyond endurance wanted,

needed his father especially. ‘No, Mrs Butler, thank you, I haven’t had a problem with my spring allergy since I was a child,’ says Daniel. ‘Where’s Mr Butler?’ Why did he call his father that?

‘Young man, where else would Mr Butler be,’ responds his mother, ‘but in the garden in the spring morning?’

Daniel looks expectantly out beyond the open window and sees his father kneeling digging vigorously with his bare hands a hole in the garden in the spring morning, and feels comforted. He thinks to ask his mother whether he should go out and help his father, then looks at himself and the casual bright-pink suit with the fresh white carnation pinned to the left lapel, not only a stark but insulting contrast, he feels, to the extremely austere black dress she is wearing. Regardless, no, he does not want to chance ruining it by helping his father dig the hole. Anyway, his father would in all likelihood not accept any help from him; he always preferred doing things alone. ‘Mrs Butler,’ he asks as he thinks how curious it is, ‘why’s Mr Butler not having breakfast with us here in the day-room?’

‘Young man, Mr Butler when he was with us,’ responds his mother, ‘always said that it’s best for a man to dig with his own hands a hole in a garden in the spring, and best first thing in the morning.’

When his father was with us? Daniel looks anxiously out beyond the open window and sees his father still kneeling digging vigorously with his bare hands the hole in the garden in the spring morning, and feels relieved.

His father pauses, takes off a straw hat he is wearing and ruffles his black hair, then puts the straw hat back on and resumes digging vigorously with his bare hands the hole.

Black hair? How has his father black hair, exactly as in the old days when he was young and Daniel himself a child? For in the most recent photos he saw of his father, which his mother sent to him ten years ago, twenty years ago, thirty years ago, forty years ago, fifty years ago, all those uncountable years ago–uncountable years ago?–his hair was white. Therefore his father color his white hair? If so, his father, his fearless father afraid of white hair? Daniel looks doubtfully at his mother wearing the extremely austere black dress.

She picks up distractedly the cracked and chipped cup empty of the coffee and immediately puts it back on the table, then a grief-like expression fleets across her elderly face framed by her white hair.

When did he drink the coffee? What is going on? Maybe his mother is right that he is having an attack of his spring allergy, his spring allergy with the disorientating fever it often brought, though he has not had one since he was a child and used to come with his parents here to the house in the country in the spring. If so, it might also be why he can only call her “Mrs Butler” and his father “Mr Butler” and, though illogical, why he is “young man” to her.

‘Young man, if truth be told,’ says his mother, ‘you’re too late: Mr Butler departed last night on a boat.’

Departed from the house in the country on a boat? And, regardless of how, his father gone? For all Daniel has to do to prove his father is still here is to look out beyond the open window and on the garden in the spring morning. What is going on? An attack of his spring allergy, yes, his spring allergy with the disorientating fever, though he does not feel any stuffiness in his nose, runniness in his eyes or congestion in his head, much less a

fever of any kind, and though he has not had one since he was a child and used to come with his parents here to the house in the country in the spring. ‘Please, Mrs Butler, could you pass me a paper napkin?’ asks Daniel. Why did he say that? ‘It seems,’ as he suddenly thinks that he should pretend so as to make his mother happy, ‘my spring allergy is bothering me.’

‘You do understand, don’t you?’ responds his mother. ‘I could see you were very polite from the moment you entered the day-room,’ and picks up a paper napkin and offers it to him, then withdraws it and crumples it, and a grief-like expression fleets across her elderly face framed by her white hair. ‘No, young man, the good intention is enough. But are you ready to follow Mr Butler?’

Ready to follow his father to where? Daniel looks out beyond the open window and sees an oblong mound of loamy earth in the garden in the spring morning where his father was digging vigorously with his bare hands the hole, and feels a throb of the old familiar fear. He turns fretfully to his mother wearing the extremely austere black dress, then hears his father’s firm intense voice *A man’s in the world to make his way alone, alone to the very end*. ‘Yes, but where am I to follow Mr Butler to?’ he says, he cannot help, in a fairly hysterical voice. ‘Do I need a suitcase? Is there anything special I should take with me? What about my shaving gear?’ Why did he ask about that? ‘Or am I only to go somewhere for the morning?’

‘The morning? The whole day? Longer? Young man, nobody can know that,’ answers his mother. ‘And you understand of course it’s more fitting, more right, more decent not to shave.’

Daniel looks anxiously at himself and the casual bright-pink suit with the fresh white carnation pinned to the left lapel and sees the

many years' growth of his white beard lying on it over his chest, and feels a throb of the old familiar fear. What is going on? He is sure that he saw his face in the mirror in the bathroom completely shaved and, better yet, young earlier this morning. Or was it earlier that long-ago spring morning–long-ago spring morning?– he came here to the day-room to have breakfast with his parents? Anyway, yes, he is having an attack of his spring allergy with the disorientating fever, though he does not feel even the faintest touch of a fever of any kind.

'Young man, prepare yourself,' says his mother, 'because the time's come for you to depart: you must now return to the bar.'

Return to the bar in the red-light district of the city and being here at the house in the country in the spring? He looks optimistically out beyond the open window and sees the oblong mound of loamy earth in the garden in the spring morning where his father was digging vigorously with his bare hands the hole, and feels a throb of the old familiar fear.

'Yes, you must return to the bar,' insists his mother. 'Young man, immediately, this very moment–because it might already be too late.'

Daniel gets up quite against his will from beside his mother wearing the extremely austere black dress and sees tears flowing down her elderly face framed by her white hair, and feels the deepest of pangs. He kisses her tenderly as he can, he knows with the greatest certainty, good-bye forever and tries with all his might to say to her "Mother," then hears the last lament of an old, old man *Mama*...

...Before the mirror in the bathroom hunched over, Daniel looks hesitantly at his face and sees it completely shaved and, better yet, young, exactly as when he went to have breakfast with his mother

and father in the day-room at the table before the window open on the garden in that long-ago spring morning, and feels reassured. Hunched over, he turns away from the mirror and suddenly remembers that he must return to the bar, the bar with the sinister customers, and feels an onslaught of panic, then shuffles off as fast as he can...

...Down a dark narrow passage with a roar of sinister laughter right behind him he hunched over shuffles as fast as he can with the roar of sinister laughter right behind him, the roar of sinister laughter right before him, the roar of sinister laughter surrounding him closing in on him...

...Before a door hunched over, Daniel makes to open it and hears gigantic dogs burst into a frenzy of howling and barking and growling behind it. No, he cannot just now depart, depart from wherever he might be; he is just now very much afraid, though no longer a child but a man and has been for many years...

...Extremely hunched over, hairless, shriveled, emaciated to the bone, feeble as can be, trembling uncontrollably, Daniel is an old, old man somewhere alone, alone, alone...

...Alone in a boat on an unseen stream through lightless catacombs with a hollow sound of plashing and dripping.

Sitting at a table in the bar with his father, he hopes, across from him, Daniel sees that it is exactly as in the old days, including the same sort of customers, mostly natives of the red-light district, thieves, cheats, snitches, pushers, junkies, pimps, whores and others of similar ilk and even more sinister. But, as opposed to how they used to behave in the past, such and such are not creating the slightest disturbance, nor even talking or making a sound of any kind, but merely drinking and smoking at the tables.

Maybe they have become less sinister, or even more or less rehabilitated. But it is very difficult to believe; at any moment they might all at the very least burst into a roar of sinister laughter. He looks anxiously across the table and sees his father sitting there, dressed in an extremely austere black suit, not in the same style as he himself is dressed–why should he be?–the casual bright-pink suit with the fresh white carnation pinned to the left lapel, and feels reassured.

His father shakes his head as if in disagreement with something.

Daniel looks anxiously at himself and the casual bright-pink suit and sees a withered black carnation pinned to the left lapel, and feels a throb of the old familiar fear. But some time, yes, some time has passed since he departed from the house in the country in the spring and returned to the bar in the red-light district of the city, more than enough for the fresh white carnation to wither.

‘Young man,’ says his father in a very loud voice, though with no need, the bar being empty of sound of any kind, ‘look at that hot one over there,’ as he nods in the general direction of some nearby tables occupied by both men and women drinking and smoking.

Hot one? His father? ‘Don’t you think, Mr Butler,’ responds Daniel steadily as he can as he feels a throb of the old familiar fear, ‘we should try not drawing attention to ourselves?’ and notices his father has his hands under the table, then suddenly remembers the .38 he kept under the counter beside the cash-register. Considering everything else in the bar is exactly as when his father owned it, including the same sort of customers, though without the din and commotion they made, and even without a sound of any kind, maybe the gun is there where it used to be. Should he not get up and go see whether it is? And if it is, take it

and keep it ready in his hand? For if anything happens, he cannot very well count on his father's, his fearless father's iron fists, as he did when he was a child in the old days of the bar; his father is now an elderly man, though he appears across from him exactly as when he was young and Daniel himself a child, though he never wore such an extremely austere black suit. Moreover, having them under the table, maybe his father does not want to put his hands to service, not even to protect his son. But above all there is what he used to say to him in his firm intense manner: "a man's in the world to make his way alone." Is Daniel not a man and has been for many years, therefore is it not high time for him to accept and live the truth of what his father used to say to him without any cowardly conniving and backsliding?

'She really wants it,' says his father in a very loud voice as he nods in the general direction of some nearby tables occupied by both men and women drinking and smoking.

Daniel sees all the men and women, the silent sinister men and women drinking and smoking at not only the nearby tables but all the tables in the bar suddenly pause and look angrily at him and his father, and feels an onslaught of the old familiar fear. His father starting a fight and, what is more, over some woman? 'Mr Butler,' he says as steadily as he can, trying to distract him, 'shouldn't we have something to drink?' and gets up, goes to the counter and leans over it, then makes to grab a bottle of liquor and notices a .38 beside the cash-register. He takes it up and goes back and sits at the table, with his father there dressed in the extremely austere black suit and with his hands under it–when any moment now he might have need of them–at least somewhat braced by the .38 in his hand, the very same one, he feels positive, his father had in the old days of the bar.

‘Every one of the women here in the bar,’ yells his father, ‘is nothing but a dirty slut!’

Daniel suddenly feels a great foreboding dread previously unknown to him and sees the whole crowd of angry silent sinister men and women, a quite numberless throng surround him and his father and all the very same ones he was afraid of when he was a child all those uncountable years ago and all in an outright rage, all the natives of the red-light district, all the thieves, all the cheats, all the snitches, all the pushers, all the junkies, all the pimps, all the whores and all the muggers, all the arsonists, all the extortionists, all the rapists, all the kidnappers, all the murderers and all multiplied and multiplied and endlessly multiplied into millions upon millions flowing out of the bar into the darkness and flooding the streets of the whole city in the darkness.

Before the dire threat, Daniel looks with great importunity at his father dressed in the extremely austere black suit and sees him suddenly extremely hunched over, hairless, shriveled, emaciated to the bone, feeble as can be, trembling uncontrollably, an old, old man with the stumps of what used to be his hands on the table, and freezes with horror.

‘A man’s in the world to make his way alone,’ says his father, an old, old man, in a horrendous travesty of his firm intense manner of all those uncountable years ago.

Daniel, trying with all his might to hold himself together and accept the fact that he must deal with the dire threat alone, looks at the millions upon raging silent sinister millions surrounding him in the darkness and next at the .38 in his hand and realizes how useless it is–six bullets against millions upon millions?–then suddenly gives up all thought of resistance.

Daniel hears his father's firm intense voice of all those uncountable years ago beyond the millions upon raging silent sinister millions surrounding him in the darkness, and beyond the darkness from the house in the country in the spring, and beyond the open window of the day-room extremely muffled beneath the oblong mound of loamy earth in the garden in the spring morning *Alone to the very end*.

'Try to understand, please,' says Daniel as steadily as he can to the millions upon raging silent sinister millions and endless millions surrounding him in the darkness as he realizes he must at last admit the truth, 'I'm alone–have been for all these uncountable years' and feels the irremediable terrible loneliness of all those uncountable years suddenly descend on him. He looks at himself and the casual bright-pink suit with the withered black carnation pinned to the left lapel and sees the many years' growth of his white beard lying on it over his chest, then hears the last lament of an old, old man *Papa*...

...Alone in a boat on an unseen stream through lightless catacombs with a hollow sound of plashing and dripping.

The Man Who Loved His Hands

With the huge suitcase by the taxi parked in the street in front of his house. A man and woman and two children on the porch go inside. The door slams shut. His house: lost.

–Only the clothes on his back to his name.

At least his best grey tweed suit, best black leather shoes and best black felt hat, with his nice white silk shirt, nice black silk socks and nice red silk handkerchief. The huge suitcase. But even if he had no clothes, he'd still have the most important thing: all his money stuffed in the huge suitcase to near bursting.

Luckily those goons who broke into his house and threw him out didn't know that the huge suitcase contained all his money and, what is more, such an amount. Only a short while before he was, as is his wont, running his hands through the heap of banknotes in the huge suitcase.

–His old life: ended.

Now he's to take a journey by a train to somewhere or other: to begin his new life. He definitely must quit the city, because the news of his getting evicted from his house is sure to reach his creditors by this evening at the latest, spelling the collapse of his used car business.

'Buddy, you'd better get going or you'll delay your train,' the driver in the open window of the taxi hostilely. 'But of course you can never miss it,' and gasps and coughs.

He can never miss it? And how does the driver even know that he wants to catch a train? But perhaps the driver inferred it from the huge suitcase. The trunk of the taxi pops open. He lifts up the huge suitcase and puts it in the trunk.

Beside the driver in the taxi. ‘The train station, please.’

‘Buddy, you don’t have to be redundant. Where else would you want to go for your journey by your train but to the train station?’ the driver hostilely. ‘For that matter, how else would you travel by your train to your destination but by your train? Do think by some jalopy of a used car?’ and gasps and coughs.

What with the hostility and the mention of a used car, the driver is probably a disgruntled former customer of his, or has a relative or friend who is.

A taxi license taped to the dashboard. Joe Miller. The driver’s last name is the same as his. But with Miller being a very common last name, it’s not much of a coincidence.

The taxi moves off from in front of his house. His kids, his boy and girl, on the porch look at him. He waves. His kids on the porch turn round and go inside. Perhaps his kids couldn’t recognize him because the taxi was already too far away.

It was his own family who went inside his house a short while ago. The man he mistook for the father is obviously some boyfriend of his ex-wife. Apparently his ex-wife and kids, though undeserving, and even a complete stranger are to enjoy his house and so all the cash money dished out on the monthly payment over the years.

Though his ex-wife and kids have finally stolen his house from him through the machinations of the courts, at least he managed never to give any of the money for alimony and child support over the years. And he’ll see about his house once he gets set up again somewhere else, in some other city with his money in the huge suitcase in the trunk of the taxi, many times more than the amount needed.

The driver gasps and coughs. The taxi parked in the street in front of the train station.

–An aversion to the journey. He'd prefer not even to get out of the taxi.

'Get out of the taxi!' Joe Miller furiously. 'Get out of the taxi!' and bursts into a fit of gasps and coughs.

With the driver on the plaza by the taxi parked in the street in front of the train station. 'My man...Joe Miller,' a bit disconcerted, 'how...much do I owe you?'

The driver bursts into a fit of gasps and coughs.

'You owe,' Joe Miller sarcastically, 'a great chest of Spanish doubloons,' and gasps and coughs.

He hopes that whatever illness the driver has isn't contagious. 'Joe Miller, be serious, how much do I owe you?'

'Buddy,' Joe Miller solemnly, 'you can never pay what you owe.'

He can never pay what he owes? Is that why the driver spoke solemnly, though he told him merely to be serious, implying to lay off the sarcasm? The driver doesn't know that he has plenty of money: all the cash money hoarded over the years stuffed in the huge suitcase to near bursting.

'Buddy,' Joe Miller, 'those hands of yours.'

His hands, his comfortable plump hands.

His hands when he sold a used car. He always gloated and sometimes fairly snickered over the banknotes being counted out into his hands.

His comfortable plump hands.

His hands when he petted his kids and messed with his wife before the divorce. What always made it rather pleasant touching his kids and wife were his hands.

His comfortable plump hands.

His hands when he had his meals. The real satisfaction of eating a fried pork chop or a barbecued chicken leg, drinking a cold bottle of beer or, topping it all off, smoking a choice cigar was always in his hands.

His comfortable plump hands.

‘Your hands, you, buddy,’ Joe Miller, ‘have you ever known the endless days and nights of my toil of gripping a steering-wheel and barely being able to breathe? Endlessly driving people around and barely being able to breathe? Never resting for even a minute and barely being able to breathe? You, buddy?’ and bursts into a fit of gasps and coughs.

He very much hopes that whatever illness the driver has isn’t contagious. ‘That’s all very well, Joe Miller. But how much do I owe you?’

‘I don’t take cash money, get it?’ Joe Miller hostilely. ‘Give me that,’ points at his red silk handkerchief in the right pocket of the coat of his grey tweed suit.

‘Give you,’ quizzically, ‘my red silk handkerchief?’

–An aversion to the journey. He’d prefer even to stay where he is on the plaza by the taxi parked in the street in front of the train station.

‘Buddy, sorry, the Transportation Authority says you have to move on,’ Joe Miller condolingly. ‘And, sorry, first you’re going to have to give me your red silk handkerchief.’

How wonderful his hands with his red silk handkerchief.

The driver with his red silk handkerchief. The driver gasps, coughs up something and spits it into his red silk handkerchief.

Alone on the plaza by the taxi parked in the street in front of the train station. His red silk handkerchief is really much too high a

price to pay for the fare. The taxi moves off. ‘Joe Miller, wait a minute.’

–All his money in the huge suitcase in the trunk of the taxi! He makes to run after the taxi and can’t: as though glued to the spot. All his money hoarded over the years gone!

Now he’s dispossessed of everything, all his money, his house, his used car business, even his red silk handkerchief.

–Only the clothes on his back to his name.

But at least his best grey tweed suit, best black leather shoes and best black felt hat, with his nice white silk shirt and nice black silk socks.

Perhaps it’s to his good that he has nothing but the clothes on his back to his name, because it might do for an excuse to stay where he is and not go on the journey. Yes, what ever could he do without any money anywhere else but where he is on the plaza by the street in front of the train station?

‘Mister,’ someone, ‘may I help you with your baggage?’

An emaciated boy of about eight. ‘Boy, I don’t have any baggage.’

‘It makes no difference. I have to carry something,’ the emaciated boy porter. ‘It’s a directive of the Transportation Authority.’

‘What’s your name, boy?’

‘They call me,’ the emaciated boy porter, ‘Little Miller.’

First the driver and now the porter. But with Miller being a very common last name, it’s not at all strange.

‘Mister,’ Little Miller, ‘give me the coat of your grey tweed suit to carry.’

The stupid brat can’t con him with his years of experience selling used cars.

How wonderful his hands with the coat of his grey tweed suit.

The porter with the coat of his grey tweed suit.

‘Thanks, Mister,’ Little Miller. ‘But, as I told you, they call me Little Miller, not stupid brat.’

Little Miller or stupid brat, what’s the difference? The skinny runt is quite particular.

–Linger with the porter so as to miss the train. But the driver said that he can never miss it.

‘No, Mister, you can never miss your train, your very own train, because it’ll never leave without you,’ Little Miller. ‘So you might as well not delay your train. In fact, believe me, it’ll be very much better for you not to.

‘And, Mister, as you immediately saw yourself, I’m an emaciated boy of about eight, not a skinny runt. Now, please, come with me.’

With the porter with the coat of his grey tweed suit by the entrance of the train station. Not a single other person in sight, much less, as often, a bustling crowd. It might have to do with it being a weekday.

Being a weekday, if things were as they used to be till only early this morning and the moment those goons broke into his house and threw him out, he would’ve been at the lot, surely making at least a sale or two before lunch at noon. But now he’s by the entrance of the train station, on his way to catch the train for the journey to somewhere or other.

–A strong aversion to the journey. He’d much prefer, because his old life is ended and he can’t return to it, to walk around by the entrance of the train station, even with only the clothes on his back and nothing else to his name, his grey tweed suit with the porter carrying the coat, white silk shirt, black felt hat, black

leather shoes and black silk socks, feeling occasionally with his hands what's left to him. And having a fair amount to burn up, being hefty, he could walk around by the entrance of the train station, feeling occasionally with his hands what's left to him, for a fairly long while.

'Mister,' Little Miller, 'I'm only required to carry this to the entrance of the train station,' lifts up the coat of his grey tweed suit toward him.

He makes to take the coat of his grey tweed suit into his hands and the porter pulls it quickly away from him.

'My tip, Mister,' Little Miller.

Disappointingly he won't get off without paying. 'Of course, I forgot. What do I owe you?'

'It's not good to fib, Mister,' Little Miller.

'Simply tell me,' a bit vexed, 'what I owe you.'

'Owe me? Owe only me and nobody else?' Little Miller. 'Anyhow, it'll be a great chest of Spanish doubloons.'

It's a bit curious that the payment asked by the porter for a childish jest is the same payment asked by the driver sarcastically. 'Little Miller, don't be funny. What do I owe you?'

'Mister, you should know yourself what you owe,' Little Miller. 'Anyhow, if you don't in fact have a great chest of Spanish doubloons to give, I'll keep the coat of your grey tweed suit.'

The stupidity of having paid the driver for the fare with his red silk handkerchief. 'Isn't that extravagant for a tip?'

'It isn't for the tip, but the fine prescribed by the Transportation Authority on your inability to give a great chest of Spanish doubloons,' Little Miller. 'The tip will be the vest of your grey tweed suit.'

–Run away at once. He makes to run away and can't: as though glued to the spot.

But even if he could run away, from here to where? No, he has nowhere to go. So he might as well stay where he is by the entrance of the train station.

'Mister,' Little Miller, 'those hands of yours.'

His hands, his comfortable plump hands.

His hands when he sold a used car. He always gloated and sometimes fairly snickered over the banknotes being counted out into his hands.

His comfortable plump hands.

His hands when he petted his kids and messed with his wife before the divorce. What always made it rather pleasant touching his kids and wife were his hands.

His comfortable plump hands.

His hands when he had his meals. The real satisfaction of eating a fried pork chop or a barbecued chicken leg, drinking a cold bottle of beer or, topping it all off, smoking a choice cigar was always in his hands.

His comfortable plump hands.

'Your hands, you, Mister,' Little Miller, 'have you ever known the endless days and nights of my toil of lifting and carrying people's things and never having more than a morsel to eat? Endlessly holding people's things and never having more than a morsel to eat? Never resting for even a minute and never having more than a morsel to eat? You, Mister?'

A cordon of soldiers armed with a machine gun in the entrance of the train station eyeing him. 'All right, Little Miller,' a bit disconcerted, 'all right.'

How wonderful his hands with the vest of his grey tweed suit.

The vest and coat of his grey tweed suit hanging tent-like on the porter, being a mere boy of about eight and emaciated and himself a grown man and hefty to say the least.

Gone the vest and coat of his grey tweed suit, gone his red silk handkerchief, gone all his money, gone his house, gone his used car business. His prospects aren't too bright to say the least.

Now with only his white silk shirt, grey tweed pants, black felt hat, black leather shoes and black silk socks to his name for him to enter the train station, find the train and board it, go on the journey, arrive somewhere or other and begin his new life.

–His hands, his comfortable plump hands. So things aren't at all as bad as they first appear: his comfortable plump hands.

'Sir,' someone emphatically but politely, 'get a move on into the train station.'

A soldier without any gun and with two stripes.

'Yes, sir,' the soldier salutes him. 'Sergeant Miller at your service, sir.'

The driver, the porter and now the soldier. But with Miller being a very common last name, it's not too strange.

'The Transportation Authority forbids you to stay here, sir,' Sergeant Miller emphatically but politely. 'So get a move on into the train station, sir.'

–Run away at once. But he has nowhere to go. So maybe he can run away for as long as his hefty body bears up.

'Sir,' Sergeant Miller a bit threateningly but politely, 'don't even think to run away.'

'But, Sergeant Miller, I'm not sure now whether I really want to take the journey. If I can't run away, can't I at least stay here where I am and as I am with only the clothes on my back to my

name? Can't you make an exception? Or can't you at least pass on my request to the Transportation Authority?'

'Sir, that you're not sure now whether you really want to take your journey is totally irrelevant,' Sergeant Miller. 'Sir, we're under strict orders of the Transportation Authority to ensure you enter the train station.'

'Is there some kind of a problem?'

'Some kind of a problem, sir?' Sergeant Miller. 'What kind of a problem, sir?'

'Well, Sergeant Miller, it's not very normal for soldiers armed with a machine gun to be guarding the entrance of the train station.'

'Guarding the entrance of the train station, sir?' Sergeant Miller. 'We're not guarding the entrance of the train station, sir,' and turns to the cordon of soldiers armed with a machine gun in the entrance of the train station.

'No, sir!' the cordon of soldiers armed with a machine gun in the entrance of the train station ferociously. 'We're not guarding the entrance of the train station, sir!'

'Now, sir,' Sergeant Miller a bit threateningly but politely, 'move on into the train station.'

Apparently he has no choice but to comply. He makes to move on into the train station and the soldier steps quickly in his way.

'Sir, if you notice, I'm not wearing a helmet like the others nor even a hat,' Sergeant Miller. 'Sir, do you know why?'

The soldier in fact not wearing a helmet like the others nor even a hat. 'No, Sergeant Miller, why?'

'Because, sir, I don't have a helmet like the others nor even a hat,' Sergeant Miller. 'I sold all my army-issue helmets and hats, sir, to raise money for the missus's funeral.

‘So, sir, I’d appreciate it very much if you could give me your black felt hat. Believe me, sir, the missus would’ve felt the same gratitude if she were still alive,’ and gulps down several sobs.

Lost the vest and coat of his grey tweed suit and his red silk handkerchief, aside from all his money and everything else. ‘Sorry to hear about your wife, Sergeant Miller. But my black felt hat too?’

‘Yes, sir!’ the cordon of soldiers armed with a machine gun in the entrance of the train station ferociously. ‘Your black felt hat too, sir!’

‘Or, sir,’ Sergeant Miller, ‘a great chest of Spanish doubloons.

‘Sir, you understand,’ and gulps down a sob. ‘Sir, those hands of yours.’

His hands, his comfortable plump hands.

His comfortable plump hands.

‘Your hands, you, sir,’ Sergeant Miller, ‘have you ever known the endless days and nights of my toil of commanding a squadron and always thinking of a dear departed one? Leading a squadron on endless marches and always thinking of a dear departed one? Never resting for even a minute and always thinking of a dear departed one? You, sir?’ and bursts into a fit of sobs.

Lost the vest and coat of his grey tweed suit and his red silk handkerchief, aside from all his money and everything else. ‘That’s all very well, Sergeant Miller. But my black felt hat too?’

‘Yes, sir!’ the cordon of soldiers armed with a machine gun in the entrance of the train station ferociously. ‘Your black felt hat too, sir!’

How wonderful his hands with his black felt hat.

The soldier wearing his black felt hat.

‘Thank you, sir,’ Sergeant Miller salutes him. ‘I’m much obliged, sir,’ and gulps down a sob.

The soldiers armed with a machine gun break the cordon in the entrance of the train station, form a line on each side and present arms.

Inside the train station. The train station deserted. Regardless of the assertion to the contrary of the soldiers armed with a machine gun in the entrance outside, there must be some kind of a problem. Perhaps there’s a strike.

–A strong desire to remain in the deserted train station: a strong desire not to board the train, not to take the journey, not to reach the destination of where he has no idea and not to make his new life with nothing but the clothes on his back to his name, his white silk shirt, grey tweed pants, black leather shoes and black silk socks.

–His hands, his comfortable plump hands. So things aren’t at all as bad as they first appear: his comfortable plump hands.

‘My son,’ someone, ‘would you like tourist information?’

A blind old man in a tourist information booth. Perhaps he can miss the train and avoid the journey by passing the time getting tourist information. ‘Yes, please, old man.’

‘My son, you know you can never miss your train, your very own train, because it’ll never leave without you,’ the blind old guide. ‘No, your train will never leave without you.

‘And, my son, you can call me Grandpa Miller.’

The driver, the porter, the soldier and now the guide. But with Miller being a very common last name, it’s only a bit strange.

Though all of them have the same last name as his, how could the driver, the porter, the soldier and the guide know the train, or, granted, his very own train will never leave without him,

particularly with him not having decided on his destination and not even wanting to, but wanting only to stay where he is by the tourist information booth in the deserted train station? ‘Well, Grandpa Miller, it seems there aren’t many people in the train station for you to give tourist information to today.’

‘My son, there’ve never been any people in the train station for me to give tourist information to,’ Grandpa Miller, ‘except for you yourself now,’ and stares him blindly in the face.

–A dread of something in the deserted train station. ‘So why don’t you,’ anxiously, ‘move your tourist information booth to somewhere else?’

‘But,’ Grandpa Miller, ‘who would give you tourist information?’ and stares him blindly in the face.

–A dread of something in the deserted train station. ‘But, Grandpa Miller, tell me,’ anxiously, ‘why there’ve never been any people in the train station for you to give tourist information to, except for me myself now?’

‘My son, you only need to know only you are, have ever been and will ever be in the train station for me to give tourist information to,’ Grandpa Miller. ‘But there’re others not in need of tourist information who’re only here to attend to you,’ and stares him blindly in the face.

–A dread of something in the deserted train station. ‘Others not in need of tourist information who’re only here to attend to me?’ anxiously. ‘Why attend to me? How attend to me?

‘Please, Grandpa Miller, please,’ imploringly, ‘can’t you give me the best tourist information money can buy?

‘Don’t worry, I’ll manage to pay you,’ hastily. ‘If not today, one day, when I’ll have made my new life and have cash money in my hands.’ His hands, his hands with no cash money.

‘Yes, my son,’ Grandpa Miller steps out of the tourist information booth, ‘your hands have no cash money in them,’ and stares blindly at his hands.

His hands with no cash money! ‘How...how...Grandpa Miller,’ very disconcerted ‘how...much do...do I owe?’

‘You know how much you owe without my having to tell you,’ Grandpa Miller. ‘You owe so much that you can never pay.’

–A great chest of Spanish doubloons. ‘What about a great chest of Spanish doubloons?’ anxiously. ‘If I had one, wouldn’t it even be enough?’

‘It’s too late now to settle your account with a great chest of Spanish doubloons,’ Grandpa Miller, ‘much less with a huge suitcase stuffed to near bursting with cash money hoarded over years. Yes, it’s one of the more plain directives of the Transportation Authority.

‘My son, your hands,’ and stares blindly at his hands.

–Hide himself from his hands at once. But hide himself from his hands, his comfortable plump hands?

‘Your hands, you, my son,’ Grandpa Miller, ‘have you ever known the endless days and nights, the years upon endless years of my toil of waiting to give tourist information and never being able to see anybody or anything? Never resting for even a minute and never being able to see anybody or anything? No, never resting for even a second and never being able to see anybody or anything? You, my son?’ and stares blindly at his hands.

–Hide himself from his hands at once. Frightened of his hands?! ‘How...how,’ very disconcerted ‘can I...I...pay?’

‘Well, I could use those,’ Grandpa Miller stares blindly at his black leather shoes and black silk socks, ‘to replace my shabby shoes and socks.’

The guide's shoes and socks in fact shabby. 'Right away, Grandpa Miller,' relieved.

How wonderful his hands with his black leather shoes and black silk socks.

The guide wearing his black leather shoes and black silk socks.

'Thank you, my son,' Grandpa Miller. 'But it's time for you to move on now.'

'With my hands empty? With only my white silk shirt and grey tweed pants to my name?

'And alone? Grandpa Miller, can't you come with me?'

'No, the Transportation Authority forbids it,' Grandpa Miller. 'Yes, you must move on alone.

'But, my son, try always to remember you have your tee-shirt and underwear too,' and stares off blindly somewhere in the deserted train station.

'Try always to remember,' quizzically, 'I have my tee-shirt and underwear too?'

'Burt Miller,' the public-address system, 'wanted at the window of the ticket office.'

At the window of the ticket office. A naked young woman behind it.

'Darling,' the naked young clerk sexily, 'how may I help you?'

The clerk most likely has some ticket for some train he doesn't want to mention so as to put it off for as long as possible. 'Young lady, I can't really think of how you may help me.'

'Darling, call me what all my friends do,' the naked young clerk sexily, 'call me Minx Miller.'

Again Miller? The driver Joe Miller, the porter Little Miller, the soldier Sergeant Miller, the guide Grandpa Miller and now the

clerk Minx Miller? Every one of them Miller? Even with Miller being a very common last name, isn't it very strange?

He should try to start up a conversation with the clerk so as to stay in the deserted train station for as long as possible. 'Minx Miller, how are you today?'

–Make the clerk think that he is aroused. He leers at the clerk's nakedness.

'Yes, I have something very special for you,' Minx Miller sexily. 'Come into the ticket office and see what I have for you,' and winks at him.

Inside the ticket office. The clerk in front of a counter. 'Well, Minx Miller, what do you have for me?' Tickets in a tray on the counter behind the clerk.

–Divert the clerk from the tickets at once. He leers at the clerk's nakedness.

'Darling,' Minx Miller sexily, 'what do you think I have for you?' and winks at him.

A good time of course. He reaches his hands out to the clerk and the clerk pushes them quickly away.

'Hey, what do you think I am?' Minx Miller angrily. 'What do you think this place is? Why do you think you're here? And, worst of all, who do you think you are coming here with your hands empty?'

His hands empty, as the clerk just said. The tickets in the tray on the counter behind the clerk. Unfortunately one of the tickets is his. But which ticket is his?

'Which ticket is yours?' Minx Miller. 'Any ticket is yours and all tickets are yours, because it makes no difference which train you board. Yes, any train is yours and all trains are yours and so

any train and all trains will take you to the end of your journey, to your final destination.

‘Darling,’ condolingly, ‘it’d make you feel better if you simply accepted it and stopped concerning yourself about it.’

If there’re in fact no other would-be passengers in the deserted train station, any and all trains will unfortunately be his. ‘Minx Miller, I’m trying to accept it and stop concerning myself about it.

‘But where’ll I finally end up? Will my journey by my train take long? Is my final destination far?’

‘It all depends mostly on yourself,’ Minx Miller. ‘Now choose a ticket, please,’ and turns round to the tickets in the tray on the counter.

If he refuses to choose a ticket himself, perhaps the clerk won’t give him one. ‘No, I’d prefer not to.’

‘There you are, darling,’ Minx Miller plucks up a ticket from the tray on the counter and gives it to him. ‘Keep the ticket for your train in your empty hands till you’re told what to do with it.’

His hands empty but for the ticket for his train. But for which train and to which final destination he has no idea.

‘Don’t worry, you’ll be directed to your train,’ Minx Miller. ‘But you’ll not be told your final destination. Anyway, that you know your destination is final is something.’

That he knows his destination is final is something?

–Drop the subject of his final destination at once. ‘What, Minx Miller,’ lifts up his hands with the ticket for his train, ‘do I owe?’

‘You know very well what you owe,’ Minx Miller very sexily and winks at him several times. ‘Of course you do, don’t you?’ and wiggles nakedly at him this way and that way.

Having taken him to task a short while ago for making to have a good time with her, the clerk most likely wants merely to stress to

him her need of some clothes. ‘I suppose you want my white silk shirt and grey tweed pants.’

How wonderful his hands with his white silk shirt and grey tweed pants.

His white silk shirt and grey tweed pants fitting much too big on the clerk.

‘They’re much too big for me of course, but they’ll do,’ Minx Miller. ‘You’re hefty,’ looks him up and down, ‘even rather fat, aren’t you?’

Wearing only his tee-shirt and underwear in front of a complete stranger and, what is more, being, as the clerk just said, not merely hefty but even rather fat. ‘I should be going now. But where should I go?’

With the clerk wearing his white silk shirt and grey tweed pants by the window of the ticket office in the deserted train station.

‘Go anywhere with that,’ Minx Miller points at the ticket for his train in his hands, ‘and you’ll soon find your train, your very own train.’

His hands with the ticket for his train, his very own train. But perhaps it’s to his good that he has at least something in his hands. ‘Well, Minx Miller, I guess I should thank you for your help.’

‘Don’t mention it, because that’s why I’m here, to help you and only you,’ Minx Miller. ‘Yes, the sole purpose of all of us, the driver Joe Miller who, tubercular, got your nice red silk handkerchief and all your money stuffed in the huge suitcase to near bursting, the porter Little Miller who, starved, got the vest and coat of your best grey tweed suit, the soldier Sergeant Miller who, bereaved, got your best black felt hat, the guide Grandpa Miller who, blind, got your best black leather shoes and nice black silk socks and myself the clerk Minx Miller who, naked, got your

nice white silk shirt and the pants of your best grey tweed suit, is to help you to board your train, take your journey and arrive at your final destination.'

It'd be extremely embarrassing to be deprived of his tee-shirt and underwear too, particularly being not merely hefty but rather fat. 'What about my tee-shirt and underwear? Do you know whether I'll have to give them up too?'

'Darling, I can't stand here chatting with you forever,' Minx Miller. 'The Transportation Authority forbids it.'

Alone in the deserted train station.

'Burt Miller's train,' the public-address system, 'departing in five minutes.'

He'll remain where he is in the deserted train station for the next five minutes and miss his train. No, he won't budge an inch despite any possible directive of the Transportation Authority to the contrary.

'Burt Miller's train,' the public-address system, 'departing in four minutes.'

He'll remain where he is in the deserted train station for four minutes more and miss his train.

'Burt Miller's train,' the public-address system, 'departing in three minutes.'

He'll remain where he is in the deserted train station for three minutes more and miss his train.

–His hands, his hands rather reassuring even now with the ticket for his train and only his tee-shirt and underwear to his name.

'Burt Miller's train,' the public-address system, 'departing in two minutes.'

He'll remain where he is in the deserted train station for two minutes more and miss his train.

‘Burt Miller’s train,’ the public-address system, ‘departing in one minute.’

He’ll remain where he is in the deserted train station for one minute more and miss his train.

‘Burt Miller,’ someone, ‘come along now.’

Yes, he’ll remain where he is in the deserted train station for one minute more, less than one minute more by now and miss his train. No, he won’t budge an inch despite any possible directive of the Transportation Authority to the contrary.

‘Burt Miller,’ someone, ‘the one minute more till your train departs won’t under any circumstances pass till you board it.’

A man wearing an engineer’s uniform. Deplorably the engineer is most likely the engineer of his very own train. ‘Must I really leave the deserted train station and board my train, take my journey and reach my final destination?’ disconsolately. ‘Is it by the power of the Transportation Authority? If so, can’t I at least have some kind of a personal hearing with the Transportation Authority?’

‘You see for yourself, Burt Miller, I, the engineer of your very own train, have come directly from the Transportation Authority specifically for the purpose,’ the engineer. ‘No, it’s much too late now for you to have some kind of a personal hearing with the Transportation Authority.’

An identification card clipped to the left lapel of the coat of the engineer’s uniform. No, he doesn’t want even in the least to think about it, much less come to some terms with it.

‘But, Burt Miller, being the engineer of your train,’ the engineer, ‘you’re going to have to face the fact that I’m Burt Miller.’

‘You’re...you’re,’ extremely disconcerted, ‘you’re...Burt...Burt Miller?’

‘Right, Burt Miller, I’m Burt Miller,’ the engineer Burt Miller. ‘Now come with me.’

With the engineer outside on the platform by the train.

–Get rid of the ticket for his train in his hands at once.

‘The ticket for your train in your hands, Burt Miller,’ the engineer Burt Miller, ‘is in any case quite superfluous at this point.’

How wonderful his hands without the ticket for his train.

Though contrary to what the engineer implied, perhaps once on his train the ticket control agent will ask him for the ticket and, because he won’t have it, order him off or have him thrown off. Either the one way or the other, as long as he gets off his train: as long as he doesn’t reach his final destination.

–His hands. He’ll have his hands at least if worse comes to worse and he arrives at his final destination contrary to his wish. And in fact what else and what more could he ever really want but his hands, his comfortable plump hands?

‘Burt Miller, except for myself in the engine, you’ll be alone on your train,’ the engineer Burt Miller. ‘Yes, you’ll be alone on your train for the full length of your journey to your final destination.

‘Only hope, for your own sake, your journey on your train to your final destination won’t last too long. Believe me, it’ll be much better for you to get it over with as quickly as possible.

‘So, Burt Miller, are you ready?’

‘Just one question, Burt Miller. Will I be allowed to keep my tee-shirt and underwear when I arrive at my final destination?’

‘Burt Miller, don’t you think you have more important things to worry about,’ the engineer Burt Miller, ‘than whether you’ll be allowed to keep your tee-shirt and underwear when you arrive at your final destination?’

–Board the train at once. He makes to go to the nearest coach of the train and the engineer steps quickly in his way.

‘Burt Miller, do you really expect,’ the engineer Burt Miller, ‘you’re going to board your train as you are, take your journey as you are and arrive at your final destination as you are?’

‘But I thought, Burt Miller, I might at least be allowed to keep my tee-shirt and underwear on my train for the full length of my journey to my final destination.’

‘I wasn’t referring to your tee-shirt and underwear, Burt Miller,’ the engineer Burt Miller. ‘Now follow me.’

With the engineer outside on the platform by the engine of the train.

‘Burt Miller,’ the engineer Burt Miller, ‘jump down to the track.’

‘Burt Miller,’ quizzically, ‘jump down to the track?’ and steps to the edge of the platform. The track rather far below. If he jumps down to it, he might hurt himself.

‘Trust me, Burt Miller, you won’t hurt yourself,’ the engineer Burt Miller. ‘So jump down to the track.’

A short blast of the whistle of the engine and he startled springs off the platform down to the track a few feet from the engine. He’s not too unagile after all, despite being not merely hefty but rather fat, more than filling his tee-shirt and underwear.

The engineer in the open window of the engine.

‘Burt Miller, kneel down and place both of your hands, at the wrist, on one of the rails of the track,’ the engineer Burt Miller in the open window of the engine. ‘I believe the rail on the platform side will be more convenient.’

On the verge of losing his hands! ‘Burt...Miller...what,’ extremely distressed on the track a few feet from the engine, ‘what if...if I...I...refuse?’

‘Burt Miller, you know better by now than to believe you can refuse,’ the engineer Burt Miller in the open window of the engine. ‘At most you can only delay for a short while the inevitable.

‘But, don’t worry, you’ll have a plastic bag to put your hands in and be allowed to keep them with you on your train for the full length of your journey to your final destination.’

‘My...my...my...Burt Miller,’ extremely distressed on the track a few feet from the engine, ‘my...my hands...in...a plastic bag?’

‘Right, Burt Miller, your hands in a plastic bag,’ the engineer Burt Miller in the open window of the engine. ‘Now let’s get things going. Kneel down and place both of your hands, at the wrist, on the rail of the track on the platform side.’

–A great chest of Spanish doubloons. But, even if he had one, it’s futile even to think about it. ‘Burt Miller,’ on the track a few feet from the engine despairingly, ‘a great chest of Spanish doubloons?’

‘Precisely, Burt Miller,’ the engineer Burt Miller in the open window of the engine, ‘it’s futile even to think about it.’

–Spring up and run away at the last moment to save his hands! He kneels down on the track a few feet from the engine and places his hands at the wrist on the rail of the track on the platform side.

‘Perfect, Burt Miller,’ the engineer Burt Miller in the open window of the engine. ‘Good-bye for now,’ and disappears inside.

The engine starts. His hands at the wrist on the rail of the track a few feet from the engine. He’ll spring up and run away at the last moment to save his hands.

His hands he has only really ever loved of everything in the whole world.

It'll be easy enough to spring up and run away, despite being not merely hefty but rather fat, more than filling his tee-shirt and underwear.

A series of short blasts of the whistle of the engine and he extremely alarmed makes to spring up from the track a few feet from the engine and can't: as though glued to the spot. The train begins moving forward and he stricken with horror: his hands at the wrist on the rail of the track right in front of the engine...